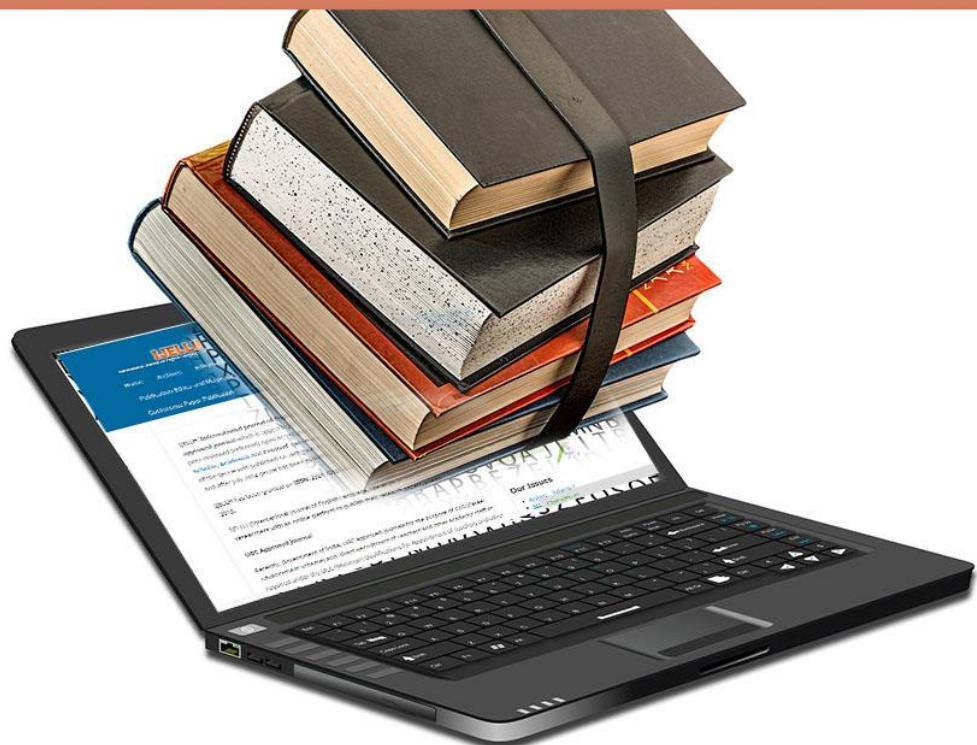


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**Impact of climatic imbalance on the social and psychological behaviour of the Foreigners: A critical analysis of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust***

**Abstract**

This article endeavours to explore the impact of climate on the foreigners with the dominance of 'heat' in the Booker Prize-winning Novel *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. The word 'heat', its various connotations and corresponding phrases are used a number of times throughout the novel. The use of Heat represents the climatic conditions that prevails in India and how this affects the Europeans. This study brings out the various interpretations of the climatic conditions in the novel. It is primarily divided into different categories such as the cultural climate which is entirely different from the culture of the Westerners; the traditions, beliefs and superstitions that are practiced in India; the natural climate that prevailed during the period caused discomfort to the foreigners. The normal change of climate has a positive effect on the environment, on the other hand it also has its

impact on the Westerners. The physical Heat had its impact on the psychological climate in the minds of the Westerners. All these aspects are elucidated through events in the novel that are divided into two periods, fifty years apart. This Heat is studied with respect to the various aspects mentioned above.

**Key Words:** Heat, Dust, Westerners, Emotions.

## Introduction

Jhabvala, an Anglo-Indian writer, had the reputation of being a popular novelist who dealt with the social and economic problems of the contemporary world. Her literary achievements are based on the artistic outcome of her creativity. describes numerous traits, impulses and tendencies in human beings. *Heat and Dust* is the eighth novel of Jhabvala which won the booker prize in 1975. This novel has also been made into a movie by Merchant Ivory Productions in 1983, for which the screenplay was written by Jhabvala herself.

*Heat and Dust* traces the parallels between the experiences of two English women in India, fifty years apart, told by means of echoes and mirror images. The novel deals with two different time periods in India. It concentrates on the experiences of two different generations of both English men and women as well as their Indian counterparts. Of the two time periods, one is the colonial India of the 1920s and the other is the post-colonial India of the 1970s. Through the passage of time, the nation had undergone different changes in terms of social, political and economic standards of the people but certain circumstances remain unchanged in both the British India and Independent India. One such unchanging, influential factor is 'heat'.

## Cultural Climate

Culture refers to the beliefs, customs, values and norms that are practiced by a collective group. India is known for its culture. The foreigners who come to India will have to adjust to it in various ways. One of the most important thing that they should cope with is the culture. The cultural climate has its impact on the Europeans who come to India. They try to adapt to it but still face some inconvenience. This cultural inconvenience of the foreigners is represented through the climatic conditions, especially through the mention of Heat in various events in the novel.

Prolonged Heat can be a cause for mental fatigue, which makes a person become overtired. The riots of the 1920s are also related in reference to 'heat'. The summer heat was in progression which created a sense of exhaustion in the minds of people. The temperature that is extremely hot has the ability to change the mood of the characters.

Heat is also responsible for mental derangement and rioting. The instances related to it are traced in this this novel. The mention of first summer of Olivia introduces the heat that Olivia encountered in India that was new to her. This was mentioned with reference to the rioting in Khatm on the Husband's Wedding Day. As it is the beginning of summer, there will be restlessness likewise there was also agitation because of the riots. Though Olivia was inside her bungalow in the Civil Lines, she was also able to feel the restlessness outside with less intensity.

'Sure enough, in that first summer of Olivia's, there was rioting in Khatm on the Husband's Wedding Day. Not that Olivia was aware of very much from inside her shuttered bungalow in the Civil Lines: and yet, a certain restlessness penetrated even into her pretty yellow drawing room where she sat playing Schuman on the piano.' (70)

The persistence of heat and dust is the reflection of the beliefs and superstitions they still cling on to. In order to stand the heat and dust the doors may be locked, in the same manner, Ritu was locked up inside the room. The intensity of heat has the comparison to the terrible sounds from the room.

‘As the heat and dust storms continue, Ritu’s condition has become worse. She has now to be kept locked up inside the room and sometimes terrible sounds come from out of there.’ (82)

The prevalence of superstitious beliefs in the Indian set up is deeply rooted. The difference is that the intensity of it changes from time to time. In the 1970s, there was still a belief that applying a red-hot iron to various parts of the body could cure anybody possessed by an evil spirit. Heat is considered as a tool to drive out the devil. The red-hot iron represents the extremity of heat. This implies the most horrible practice of superstition in the novel. Chid remained calm and said that applying the red-hot iron on various parts of her body and soles of the feet is a treatment for her. He also explained the evil spirit in Ritu can only be driven out by this way.

‘Chid remained calm: ‘It’s her treatment,’ he said. He went on to explain that she might be possessed by an evil spirit which had to be driven out by applying a red – hot iron to various parts of the body, such as her arms or the soles of her feet.’ (82)

However, it is always hard for the foreigners to continue with it for a long time. They try to accommodate themselves in the most possible way. But still it is always a discomfort for them.

#### Natural Climate

The novel is set in two different time periods. The period of Olivia is the India in the 1920s and throughout the novel it is marked as 1923. On the other hand, it is the narrator’s

India which is mentioned in months. The months are from February to June. Hence, the major part of it is believed to be in the summer months based on the climate of India.

Heat is used as a domineering factor in terms of climatic conditions. The climatic conditions also make the Europeans an outsider as they were not able to withstand the Heat.

‘The country they drove through lay broiling in the sun. It glittered like glass and seemed to stretch out endlessly. At one point the Nawab reached across Olivia to pull down the blind on her window, as if wanting to spare her the sight of all that parched land.’ (43)

This shows the intensity of heat in the land of India during Summer. In these lines from the novel the extreme heat is represented through the word ‘broiling’ which means ‘extremely hot’. The portrayal of glittering of the glass expresses the idea of the ultimate brightness of the Sun. The mention of the ‘parched land’ also examines the idea of extreme dryness of the land. The dry climate and lack of moisture are responsible for this kind of land. The reference of ‘heat’ represents the physical heat.

Another incident relating to the Indian climate is depicted through the words of the Nawab to Olivia. The relationship between the Nawab and Olivia continued as they had frequent outings. On one such day in their journey, Nawab uses the climate as an excuse for the unpleasant journey. He also considered the Heat to be the cause for the inconvenience during their journey.

Now the Nawab became charming again. He apologised for the journey – ‘Was it very horrid for you? Yes, very horrid – oh our nasty Indian climate! I feel very sorry for the inconvenience’. (44)

Heat is an instigation to the discomfort of the Western people. Both Olivia and the Nawab travelled out together, most of the times the inconvenience is seen from the point of Olivia. Even the Nawab is sorry for the inconvenience that is caused by the climate.

The climatic conditions of India are also expressed with much emphasis in the novel. When Olivia asked Harry about the dacoits and Nawab, he replied in the negative.

A lot of things go on and I'd just as soon not know about them.

Gosh but I feel ill. Awful.

‘Is it your stomach?’

‘That too. And this dashed, dashed heat.’

‘It’s cool in here. It’s lovely.’

‘But outside!’ He shut his eyes...

She went to the window. The sun was beating down of course – the gold dome of the Nawab’s mosque gave out blinding beams – but the lawns were sparkling and the fountains, refracting the sun’s rays, dazzled with light and water. (104)

The Nawab’s insistence that the intense heat was a major source of his discomfort reveals his hate for the heat. But when Olivia goes to the window and looks out, the intense heat and brightness of the Sun has an effect on her.

The positivity of nature of Heat is also examined in this novel. The extreme heat is alluded in a more interesting way in the novel. This is portrayed through the narrator’s words who describes the intense heat in an exciting way. This also renders the narrator’s observance and acceptance about the Indian climate. This also brings in the eco-critical perspective of Heat in connection with the weather, fruits, trees and flowers. The positive effect of Heat on the environment is examined. Through her words she agrees to the point that the extreme heat will provide an abundant rainfall in the future and so everybody wants it to be as much as hot it can be. The narrator also understands the Indian belief, that the extraordinary heat bestows the sweeter mangoes and melons. These are revealed through the words of the narrator as

‘Shortly after the monsoon, the heat becomes very intense. It is said that the more intense it becomes the more abundantly it will draw down the rains, so one wants it

to be as hot as can be... The hotter it is, the sweeter are the mangoes and the sugar melons, the more pungent the scent of jasmine.' (124)

The Indian climate and its weather patterns are implicitly portrayed in Heat and Dust.

The change in the season is seen when the narrator illustrates the showers of rain that has washed off the dust and the green sprouting from the cracks in the stone, though the sun was still hot. There is also the mention of Heat which keeps the ecosystem unaffected and Heat is regarded as natural and nothing out of place. It is also believed that the excess Heat brings a very good rainfall.

'Although the sun was still hot, the trees were no longer dusty but damp and dripping green. Showers of rain had also washed the dust off the graves so that the lettering stood out clearer now and tufts of green sprouted from the cracks in the stone.' (154)

As a result, the Indian climatic conditions are described in a detailed way in heat and Dust. The most remarkable of this is that there is always the mention of the word 'heat' or the phrases or words in relation to it such as 'broiling landscape', 'hot', 'hotter' and so on.

Though Heat is encountered by many characters in the novel, it is primarily the foreigners who suffer a lot than the Indians.

### Social Climate

Social climate refers to the adjustment that should be made by people in order to adjust to the society. It has connections with the human emotions. The concept of 'heat' in relation to the human emotions are portrayed in different incidents in the novel. It is also used as an excuse and is experienced by Europeans as well as Indian characters in the novel. Most of these emotions in reference to heat revolve around the protagonist of the novel.

Olivia, who wanted to be an independent person felt lonely in the big house in the Civil Lines. The doors and windows were closed most of the times. She played the piano and the day seemed very long for her as she was alone. She spent most of her time in solitude as Douglas was extremely busy with his work in the district.

‘The rest of the time Olivia was alone in her big house with all the doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and dust. She read, and played the piano, but the days were long, very long, very long. Douglas was of course extremely busy with his work in the district.’ (16)

The closed doors and windows which kept out the heat and dust is a symbolic representation of Olivia in isolation. The ‘heat and dust’ is the reference to detachment of Olivia from the world and people outside. This eventually made her feel bored and paved the way for her illicit relationship with the Nawab.

Heat is used as an excuse by men to continue smoking and evade the anti-tobacco tirade. In this novel it is portrayed through the European character, Douglas. A strong feeling of displeasure is the state of anger, which is also an emotion of irritation. There are characters in the novel which exhibits anger. The anger is exhibited through the representation of heat. Olivia was upset with Douglas for smoking, she cried out sharply not to do that. Douglas understood that she was upset for some reasons. In order to control her anger, he said

“It’ll be all right once you get to the hills. It’s the heat, darling, that’s getting you”.

(41)

Heat is also used as an excuse for Olivia’s irritation. The repetition of the same incident is done to make the ideas clearer and also memorable. The repetition is used to emphasize the significance of Heat in the entire text. Here the reference to ‘heat’ is the mirror of Olivia’s irritation. There was the repetition of the same incident in later times and Douglas said,

‘You should have gone to Simla. The heat’s getting you down.’ (109)

Heat is accustomed to substantiate the argument against smoking. When Douglas had finished his breakfast and began to smoke, Olivia was exasperated and asked Douglas if it is necessary to smoke this early. The anger encompasses the strong feeling of displeasure towards him. This Heat initiated the argument between Olivia and Douglas against smoking.

Douglas had finished his breakfast and now lit his morning pipe (he smoked a pipe almost constantly now). He puffed at it as slowly and stolidly as he had eaten...

She cried, ‘Must you smoke that dashed *pipe*? In this *heat*?’ (117).

Heat is used as an excuse to evade the confines of the place. Once when Harry came to pick Olivia to Khatm, he did not want to go back to the Nawab’s palace. So, he was asking her to play the piano. Harry seemed to spend the entire day in Olivia’s house. Olivia who was interested to go to the palace urged him. She was constantly insisting him that they had to leave early. But Harry always considered Olivia’s house as an Oasis does not want to leave. After constant repetition she lost her patience after insisting Harry so many times that they had to leave soon.

He seemed ready to spend the day. she said, several times, ‘if we don’t leave soon, it’ll get too hot.’ (129)

Thus, most of the European characters suffer from the social climate. The climate has its impact on the foreigners.

### Psychological climate

The ‘heat’ used in many places in the novel, represents the struggle to the European characters in the novel. This refers to the psychological climate of the foreigners. Though the Indian characters also suffer from the intense heat they were able to cope with it. It is primarily the Europeans who find it difficult physically and mentally to tolerate the ‘heat’.

The Indian character, Dr. Gopal communicates this idea when he was explaining the condition of Chid to the narrator. He said,

‘This climate does not suit you people too well. And let alone you people, it does not suit even us.’ (159)

Through this it is evident that the Europeans find it difficult to live in India. Not only because of the climate, but also because of the food and living conditions that did not suit them.

In addition to the narrator, there are few more foreign characters who come to India in search of spiritual peace during the 1970s. The narrator also met three foreigners, two young men and a girl. When the narrator spoke to them she found that they came to India with great expectations to find peace but they ended up with great disappointment. Similarly, the story of a young man and girl who were inspired by the lecture of a Hindu Swami on universal love. they are robbed, cheated, suffered from diseases and the girl molested by a party of Sikh youths. Chid, an ascetic, who was attracted by the Holy scriptures came to India for a spiritual purpose. He also faced serious health issues which resulted in the damage of all his inner parts.

The general assumption is that both in the British India as well as in the post-independent India, the foreigners were unable to continue their stay in India. In 1923, except for Olivia, all other foreign characters left India as they could not adjust to the heat. For instance, it was Harry who came to pick up Olivia to the Palace in Khatm. But as time progressed he was not keeping good health. He also added that he was not able to stand the heat and also the food from the Nawab’s kitchen is unsuitable for him. In this the reference to ‘heat’ may be related to the sufferings that he had in India. He was longing to meet his mother who was sick for a long time and who often sends letters expecting his return. But the Nawab does not allow him to go back to his country. The ‘heat’ alludes to the unpleasant experience of Harry in India.

‘It was no longer Harry who came to fetch Olivia but just the car and chauffeur.

Harry was not keeping good health. He said he could not stand the heat nor the food from the Nawab’s kitchen.’ (102)

The most important character on whom the novel revolves around is Olivia. Once, when Olivia lost her temper with Douglas, she began to argue with him saying that she was interested to go to Simla with Mrs.Crawford. She also asked him if something was wrong with her. Douglas replied,

‘I told you: it’s the heat. No Englishwoman is meant to stand it.’ (118)

Through his reply it is obvious that it is difficult for the Europeans to lead a happy and peaceful life in the Eastern countries.

When Harry came to pick up Olivia, he does not want to go back to Khatm. So, he was asking her to play the piano for him. She replies that she was not playing the piano because of various reasons as someone dying or being born or married in the neighbourhood. She adds

‘I mean, it doesn’t exactly harmonise, does it... Harry, we must go or we’ll die of heat on the road.’ (130)

In these lines, both Harry and Olivia are Europeans. She was comfortable saying ‘we’ as both of them could not stand the ‘Heat’ of India. The ‘Heat’ is the unpleasant and difficult situations that they undergo. Through this it is apparent that English men and women find it hard to be in India.

## Conclusion

Being an expatriate writer and because of her long stay in India for about twenty-five years, Jhabvala was tired of India and its heat. The dominance of Heat in this novel is categorised into different forms in which they occur. The positive and the discomfort that it

instigates are also discussed with instances from the novel. Heat as an excuse to different human emotions are identified. The result of it is that most of the times it creates irritation in the characters. The Heat also has the connection with the environment and the positive effect it has over the annual rainfall, trees, fruits and so on. There is also the Heat which makes the Westerners to feel discomfort and as outsiders in India. The foreigners tried adjusting to the cultural, social and natural climate. But it is evident that most of the European characters in the novel are unable to withstand the Climate and moved to their own country. The Heat in the Indian set up had its impact over the psychological climate of the Europeans.

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